



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Re-writing history with Lincoln's own pen

Presidential Library and Museum to receive golden gift April 15

SPRINGFIELD – The 14-karat-gold combination pen/pencil from Abraham Lincoln's White House desk will be donated to the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) on Friday, April 15 by the descendants of the young couple to whom it was given by Mary Lincoln in 1865. It will be placed on public display that day in the Museum, along with a fascinating letter by a young Robert Lincoln from the same donor. They may be seen for the rest of the calendar year

Margaret Tillinghast Porter Davis of Boston, Massachusetts will donate the items that were given to her great-grandparents, who knew the Lincolns and helped protect young Tad Lincoln from an outbreak of scarlet fever. The three-inch gold implement features a pen on one end that can be flipped around in its holder to use as a pencil. It has been shown in public only once before, in 1957 for one day at the Joshua Speed farm near Louisville, Kentucky. It is the first gift of a solid gold item to the ALPLM's Lincoln Collection.

"Not only is this a generous and historic donation, but it brings to light two new stories about the Lincolns that no one previously knew. We were astounded," said the ALPLM's Lincoln Curator James Cornelius.

In July 1865, just three months after the President's assassination, Mary and her sons Tad and Robert Lincoln were living in a Hyde Park hotel south of Chicago when scarlet fever broke out in the house. Daniel W. Tillinghast and his wife, Louise, lived there as well. Louise offered to take Tad, as yet untouched by the disease, to her parents' home north of the city and keep him there until the fevers had passed on the sultry South Side. There was good reason for fear - more than 800 people, most of them children, had died of scarlet fever over the three previous Chicago

summers. By way of thanks, Mary gave the Tillinghasts the 14-karat-gold pen/pencil from her husband's desk in the White House.

The Lincolns moved to the Clifton House at the southeast corner of Madison and Wabash in Chicago in the fall of 1865. The Tillinghasts stayed in Chicago as well and remained friends with the Lincoln family, as evidenced by this October 27, 1865 note from 22-year-old Robert Lincoln to Daniel Tillinghast, also part of the donation:

“You!

Chauncey Brown expects you & me to come to his house & play a game of Billiards this evening. I propose to weigh anchor at 7 ½ P.M. Shall I have the honor of seeing you? Yours, R.T.L.”

Robert was reading law with the powerful firm of Scammon, McCagg & Fuller, and sent the letter to the Tillinghast store just three blocks away.

By the end of the year, Robert had moved into his own residence. His little brother, Tad, travelled to Europe with his mother and shortly after returning died in July 1871. Robert had the unenviable task of placing his increasingly erratic mother into a mental institution in 1875. Meanwhile, Daniel Tillinghast was overseeing the construction of a big new operation for his hides, leather, and fur business at the Union Stockyards in the winter of 1874 when he caught cold, which turned into pneumonia, and died.

Louise Tillinghast was the daughter of Chicago mayor Dr. Levi Boone (inaugurated in March 1855), and she briefly lived in Springfield before her marriage. Her aunt was Mrs. Jesse B. Thomas, whose husband was Illinois's first senator. Daniel Tillinghast's uncle was a senator from Rhode Island and a general of militia in the Civil War.

The gold pen/pencil and letter descended to their daughter, Louisa Tillinghast, who as Mrs. Thomas Edward Barry in 1933 wrote a six-page letter explaining some of the story. The items then passed to her son and daughter-in-law; and then at their deaths, to their daughter, the donor of the items, Margaret Tillinghast Porter Davis.

The gold pen/pencil joins 52,000 other items in the ALPLM's world-renowned Abraham Lincoln Collection, from which select items are placed on display in the Presidential Museum. Paid admission is required to visit the Museum.

Visit www.presidentlincoln.org for more information about programs and exhibits at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

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